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Emergency repair for Wainiha bridge

By Lester Chang - The Garden Island

Posted: Thursday, Sep 23, 2004 - 11:54:41 pm HST

Gov. Linda Lingle has released \$1 million in emergency funds to install a temporary bridge at Wainiha. The two existing "temporary" bridges that take Kuhio Highway over the Wainiha Stream were constructed following a tsunami that devastated Ha'ena in 1957.

Now one of the bridge sections is on the verge of collapsing, according to Lt. Gov. James R. "Duke" Aiona Jr., Mayor Bryan Baptiste and top state transportation officials who announced the emergency repairs Wednesday.

The untimely collapse of the bridge could result in traffic fatalities and injuries, leave residents and visitors stranded in Ha'ena and could temporarily leave areas west of the Wainiha 2 Bridge without proper fire protection.

Installation of the temporary, replacement bridge could prevent any unforeseen accidents or tragedies from occurring, officials told reporters at a meeting at the Lihu'e Civic Center.

Parts for the replacement bridge are anticipated to reach Kaua'i by the end of the October, with Hawaiian Dredging Company workers scheduled to complete the work by the end of November, state Department of Transportation officials said.

For the work, Gov. Lingle this week signed an emergency proclamation to allow the DOT to acquire and install the replacement bridge.

Gov. Lingle made the decision to issue the emergency proclamation after meeting with Baptiste on Monday to discuss the condition of the bridge.

Baptiste thanked the Lingle administration for the short "turnaround" time in studying the problem, finding a solution and coming up with funds to put in the replacement bridge.

Aiona, Baptiste and acting Department of Transportation Director Bruce Matsui stressed their major concern with the project was ensuring the safety of residents and visitors.

"The safety of the more than 4,000 people who use the Wainiha Bridge 2 every day is of paramount concern for the state and the county," Aiona said in a statement.

Matsui said DOT engineers visited the bridge last week and discovered that the deterioration had "accelerated further than we had expected."

Matsui said the engineers have been keeping track of the deterioration of the bridges, and have kept the Baptiste administration informed.



Repair and maintenance of the Waniha Bridge 2 have been done in the past, but are no longer appropriate, in light of the potential for the collapse of the bridge today, Matsui said.

The bridge is to be assembled on Kaua'i, and installation is expected to be completed by the end of November, or possibly between 45 to 60 days after the work has started, officials said.

The new bridge, in general, could handle vehicles weighing up to 88,000 pounds, said Glenn Yamamoto, a spokesman with the DOT Highways Division office on Kaua'i.

Getting the bridge parts is no guarantee as Hawai'i will be competing with communities in Florida and other states that have been hit hard by recent hurricanes and are in need of bridges for their recovery efforts, Matsui said.

Matsui said while the DOT officials wait for the temporary bridge parts to come to Kaua'i, every effort should be made by government leaders and the North Shore community to prevent overweight trucks from going over the Wainiha 2 bridge, which has a six-ton weight capacity.

"We want to stretch out the life of the bridge, just a little further (before the replacement bridge is put in)," Matsui said.

Until the replacement bridge is installed, security will be posted at the bridge to enforce the bridge's six-ton weight capacity, DOT officials, adding portable scales also will be positioned by the structure.

Having fire trucks and emergency vehicles ready to respond to fires on the North Shore and any part of Kaua'i is of equally high priority, Baptiste indicated.

Baptiste said his first impulse is have a fire truck that is ready to cross the bridge to respond to a fire that threatens life and property.

The type of fire trucks that could go across the bridge would be those that are fully loaded with water and weigh 20 tons and stripped-down trucks weighing 12 tons, he said.

A better option, perhaps, being explored at this time, as county administration officials are talking with representatives from the Hanalei Colony Resort to position a fire truck at the North Shore resort, Baptiste said.

Another option DOT officials are looking at is using a portable bridge that could span the river or parts of it to allow fire trucks to cross it, Baptiste said.

The military uses such bridges in emergencies, DOT officials said.

DOT officials hope the installation of the replacement bridge on top of the old bridge will have minimal impact on residents and visitors.

DOT officials estimate the Wainiha 2 bridge will be shut down for up to 24 hours while the new bridge is put on top of it.

DOT officials said the state will be working with county officials and area residents to determine the most appropriate date and time for the bridge closure.

"The state will notify residents, motorists and area businesses well ahead of the scheduled closure," DOT officials said in a statement.

Matsui said his DOT experts have been monitoring the "bridge situation and decided this is the best course of action."

"We appreciate the county's cooperation, and we will work closely with Mayor Baptiste and the North Kaua'i community to ensure any traffic inconveniences during the installation are kept to a minimum," Matsui said.

State officials said they are cognizant of the fact that large numbers of visitors use the Waniha 2 bridge to get to Ha'ena State Park, and will contact the North Kaua'i visitor industry and the Kaua'i Visitors Bureau to address concerns about the financial impact from the bridge work.

Marsha Wienert, the state's tourism liaison, will work with business folks to

ensure visitors and employees of companies that operate in the area are not stranded when the bridge is closed, state DOT officials said.

The replacement bridge is likely to be replaced by a permanent bridge one day, but way before that bridge goes up, residents will be asked to help form the plans and will be able to give input, Matsui said.

The Wainiha 2 bridge is one of eight age-weakened, wooden bridges that wind through the North Shore.

The Waikoko, Waioli, Waipa and Wainiha bridges all have eight-ton limits. Wainiha 2 and Wainiha 3 bridges have six-ton limits.

The Ha'ena 1 and Ha'ena 2 bridges both have 10-ton limits.

Earlier this year, DOT Highways Division officials notified Baptiste's administration that the weight limits of the bridges could not support continued crossing by heavier-than-normal vehicles, including fire trucks and commercial vehicles.

In response, Baptiste said his administration has kept in touch with DOT officials, formed strategies and will be buying a lighter 12-ton fire truck.

The vehicle is being fitted and is expected to be on Kauai in a year, Baptiste has said.

Also attending Wednesday's meeting were House Rep. Hermina Morita, D-North Kaua'i, Mamo Cummings, who will be challenging Morita in the 14th House District race during the Nov. 2 General Election, Laurie Yoshida, Gov. Lingle's liaison on Kaua'i, and Barbara Robeson, a top representative for the Hanalei Roads Committee.

The committee has successfully had 10 miles or more of roadway on the North Shore put on the State Register of Historic Places and the National Register of Historic Places to preserve unique road structures.

The eight wooden bridges and three culverts are found within the 10 miles of roadway.

DOT officials told Robeson and other that residents that their input will be solicited, and public hearings and meetings will be held for any work done on the bridges, including replacement work.

Aiona said Lingle recognizes the historical significance of the bridges, adding that the replacement bridge over the Wainiha 2 bridge "will give the community, county and state time to develop a permanent solution to the bridges," while ensuring the safety of those using them.

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